

England's local elections 2018: previewing Liverpool and Wirral

*With local elections coming up across England on Thursday, 3 May, **Tom Laing** previews the competitive seats on both sides of the River Mersey in Liverpool and Wirral. Like many of the metropolitan areas with elections this week, they offer few opportunities for Labour to advance beyond their already dominant position.*



Liverpool Town Hall. Picture: [Terry Kearney](#), via a [\(CC BY-NC 2.0\)](#) licence

Liverpool Council elections preview

Liverpool is famously a Labour stronghold, home to some of the safest Labour parliamentary constituencies in the country. The city hasn't elected a single Tory councillor in the past 20 years, so overall control of the council is not really at stake this week – but this also limits the possibility of gains for Labour. This year there are 31 seats up for election – a third of the council seats (plus one extra seat, as there is an extra vacancy in Knotty Ash ward). Labour is defending 28 of these. The main opposition comes from the Liberal Democrats, who ran the council for 12 years between 1998 and 2010, before losing control to Labour. Since then, the Lib Dems have taken a serious hit, following their participation in the Coalition government, with the party declining from 35 seats at the end of 2010 to just two seats at the end of 2015. They managed to recover some lost ground in 2016, gaining two seats from Labour. Meanwhile, the Green Party is defending two seats, while the remnants of the old Liberal Party, which rejected the merger with the SDP to create the Liberal Democrats, will be defending one seat in its stronghold Tuebrook and Stoneycroft ward.

The first important thing to point out is that Labour has 80 of the 90 seats on the city council, which means that even if they lost every seat it was defending this year, it would still have overall control of the council. Labour are not even under significant threat in many of its seats, particularly those in the north. So, let's head down towards the south of the city, where the Labour Party has been criticised for its (now shelved) plans to sell off Sefton Park in Aigburth, an issue that the Liberal Democrats are campaigning heavily on, who will be hoping to remove the only Labour councillor in the Lib Dem bastion of Church Ward, while also taking another seat in Allerton & Hunts Cross and Woolton, the two wards where they gained seats in 2016. The party is also using the Sefton Park issue to try and take the Labour-held seat of Mossley Hill, which the Liberal Democrats came close to taking in 2016. The party also has its eyes set on Cressington and other wards in the south end of the city. As the Lib Dems are defending no seats this year, a good night would probably be wiping Labour out in Church Ward and taking the seats in Allerton and Woolton. A strong result would be claiming Mossley Hill, and an exceptional Lib Dem achievement would be gaining in Cressington and Childwall. The Greens, meanwhile, are only really focused on defending their two seats – and a good result for them would be retaining their two councillors up for election this year. A bad night for the party would see them lose their single councillor in Greenbank ward and a really bad outcome would also see their group leader lose in St Michaels Ward. Labour have all but given up in some seats like Church Ward and Woolton, and are fighting against the odds to defend Allerton and Mossley Hill. A good night for Labour would see it gain Greenbank and Tuebrook, in order to offset two of its potential losses. A really good result for Labour would see them capture St Michaels Ward too, allowing the party to offset all of its most obvious losses in Woolton, Allerton and Church. An exceptional outcome for Labour would see the party gain all of its targets, whilst even defending Allerton, reducing Liberal Democrat gains to just two.

Finally, we move up to the north end of the city to Tuebrook and Stoneycroft ward, where the continuation of the Liberal Party is in a tight race to defend one seat, and where the party already lost a seat to Labour in 2015. This ward is also home to the Liberal Party's national leader, Cllr Steve Radford, who defended his council seat from Labour in 2016 with an astounding 78.3% of the vote. Radford is a very popular local figure and the party is hoping that his coat-tails effect will allow them to defend their seat this year – losing it would send the Liberal Party in Liverpool closer to the pages of a history book.

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Wirral council elections preview

Welcome to Wirral, a lesser-known borough created by the Local Government Act 1972. The borough covers much of the Wirral Peninsula, with the exception of the towns of Ellesmere Port and Neston, which come under Cheshire. Wirral is divided from Liverpool by the River Mersey to the east and is separated to the west from North Wales by the River Dee. The borough is part of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, along with Halton, Sefton, Knowsley, St Helens and, of course, Liverpool itself. Labour currently holds 39 of the 66 Seats on Wirral Council. Like most Metropolitan Councils, Wirral elects in thirds, with Labour this year defending 12 seats, Conservatives nine, (it would be eight, but there is extra vacancy in Hoylake), Liberal Democrats two and Greens one.

During the 2017 general election, Labour managed to hold Wirral West – the former seat of Work and Pensions Secretary Esther McVey – against the odds, with an increased majority. This should encourage Labour to think they can maintain their marginal council seat in Pensby. Labour is also pulling out all the stops to beat the only Green councillor. The Greens won the seat in 2014, but then failed to get any further councillors elected in 2015 or 2016. A good night for Labour would see them gaining Birkenhead and Tranmere Ward from the Greens whilst defending the rest of their seats, while an exceptional night sees them squeeze the Lib Dem and Conservative seat tally even further. The Conservatives are hoping that the unpopularity of certain council decisions will allow them to out-perform their general election result in the area and gain a handful of Labour seats. The Liberal Democrats, meanwhile, hope to defend their seats from strong Labour challenges whilst building on the swing they achieved in last year's council by-election in Claughton. The Greens are focused on trying to retain their only councillor, and defending this seat would be a good sign for the party, whose vote share has declined since 2014. A good night for the Greens would be to hold Birkenhead whilst making progress in the Labour-held seat of Prenton.

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About the author

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